

Surat khabar: The Star, Sarawak (News)

Hari/Tarikh: 10/10/2013

Muka surat: S4

Tajuk : Experimental Study Of Saltwater Crocodile To Reduce Human-crocodile Conflict.

Experimental study of saltwater crocodile to reduce human-crocodile conflict

KOTA SAMARAHAN: An experimental study is being conducted to better understand the ecology of saltwater or estuarine crocodiles in the Kuching Wetlands National Park (KWNP).

The state Forest Department, Zoology Department and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) Faculty of Resource Science and Technology are collaborating on the study.

A camera trapping exercise of the estuarine crocodile or *Crocodylus porosus* was held in the KWNP to explore the possibility of using infra-red sensor cameras in the field to study the reptile's ecology and its behaviour associated with mangrove swamps and aquatic habitat.

Leading the study are Engkamat Lading and Dayang Nuriza Abdillah. They and their team of researchers and field staff from the Forest Department are collaborating with Dr Mohd Azlan Jayasilan Abdul

Gulam Azad and his undergraduate student Siti Zulaiha Jamal from Unimas.

They have proven that the device could actually work quite well in detecting the crocodilian species, which is a cold-blooded animal, in its natural habitat.

"In the past, we have used a similar method to understand the distribution of secretive carnivores in Totally Protected Areas (TPAs) and have discovered many interesting findings.

"But now is the first time we are testing this method on the cold-blooded species such as the estuarine crocodile in Sarawak, and quite surprisingly it appears that the device seems to work effectively on the species," said Dr Azlan.

As part of the trial, a pair of camera traps were set up at certain sites around Pulau Liak in KWNP in June 22, 2013 resulting in the capture of 108 videos and 1,926 pictures or

photographs.

The photographs comprised 31 pictures of estuarine crocodiles (coming up to the riverbank, or still partly submerged in the shallow water near to the bank), otters and several pictures of crab-eating monkeys, *Macaca fascicularis*.

The pictures of the estuarine crocodiles were captured during both high and low tides while that of the mammals (otters and monkeys) were captured during low tide only, at day time.

Most of the crocodile photographs were observed at night between 8pm to 4.45am and only two pictures were recorded during the day, between 6.30am and 7.30am.

Based on the preliminary study at least two individuals were observed in a single site at different times. This somewhat sedentary behaviour of the individuals might be an indication that the animals are guarding

their breeding territory, and probably the nests as well.

Individual identification could be made possible based on markings on the head and estimation of their body size and length.

This piece of information is very important in the management of the man-eaters in Sarawak. Individual recognition of estuarine crocodiles from pictures or images captured by camera traps could also help in the population survey and monitoring of the species in future.

Effective crocodile management and conservation programme in Sarawak should incorporate such information because with better understanding of their activity period would help in reducing potential attacks on human, thus reducing human-crocodile conflict.

For more info, contact Dr Azlan at 082-582 938 or azlan@frst.unimas.my.

In focus: A picture of a crocodile captured with the camera trap.

